Aida Amer











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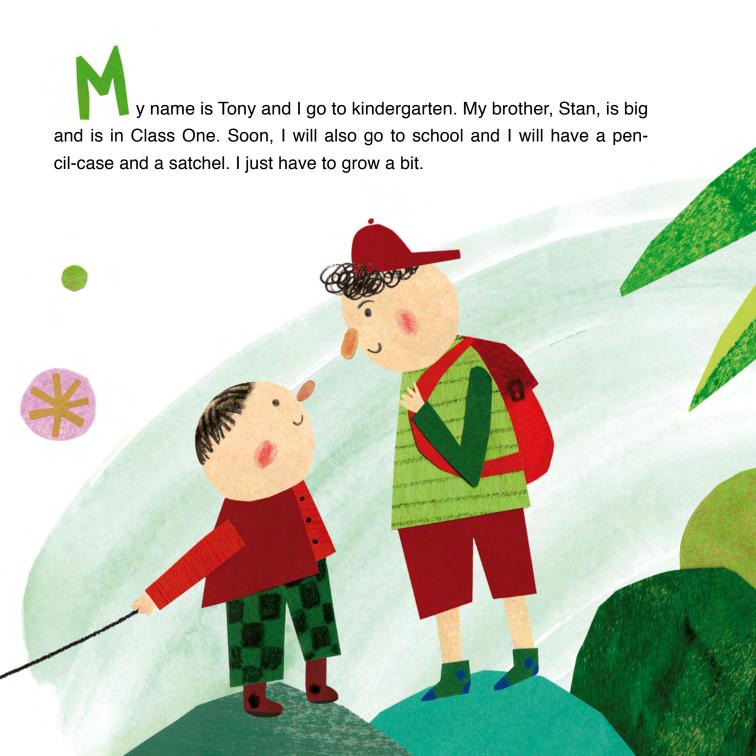
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GRANDAD'S ENCHANTED CARDEN illustrations: Agnieszka Żelewska

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I'm going to tell you a story about my Grandad's garden. It isn't at all far far away, in fact it's quite close. From home you can get there quite quickly. It's just a short walk away.



Some time ago, I went there nearly every day. My Grandad would pick me up from kindergarten and then we would go to school for Stan. We knew the whole way by heart.

First, we passed a green square with swings. The swings were great but our Grandad would not let us swing when it was raining because the seats were wet. He said we would get our trousers wet. We would meet Mrs Smith there – at that time she would be walking her four sausage dogs. They were all the same – their leads would get all tangled up and Mrs Smith was always untangling them. Then there was the newsagent's stand with Grandad's papers, and, next to it, the stand with bread and rolls.





Mmmm, they really smelled tasty! Grandad would buy us something nice for our tea. I like buns with cheese but Stan prefers doughnuts. Stan would eat the outside first and leave the bit with jam until the end. "That's not how you eat doughnuts," I once explained to Stan.

"What do you know? That's how you eat doughnuts when you go to school," he replied. "Kindergarten kids eat normally. When you grow up, you'll learn." Usually, by the time we got there, there was no trace left of our tea.

Stan did not have any front teeth then. One day they had just fallen out. I remember I cried because I thought something bad had happened to him. But Stan was very pleased because his friends had lost their teeth earlier. He had been jealous and could not wait for his turn.

"How funny you look," I teased my brother as we were walking to the garden with our Grandad. But Stan was not at all worried.

"Don't laugh, Tony, your teeth will also fall out when you start going to school," Grandad said, and tousled my hair. He had nice warm hands.

"I won't go to school then if it makes your teeth fall out!" I laughed and put my messed-up hair back in place. The little white house was hidden by greenery. It was so small that it only had room for a narrow divan bed, a little table with two stools and a tourist cooker on which Grandad made his tea. Almost the whole house was hidden by an apple tree. In the summer, it had lots of golden apples with red blushes. What was most important, however, was that tiny fairies lived in it but we never saw them because they hid during the day. Grandad told us a lot about them.





"They have tiny little wings and lanterns. At night they sometimes shine them in the darkness."

"What are the fairies called?" Stan once asked.

"They are called glow-worms," replied Grandad and smiled mysteriously.

"Why do they have lanterns?" we asked.



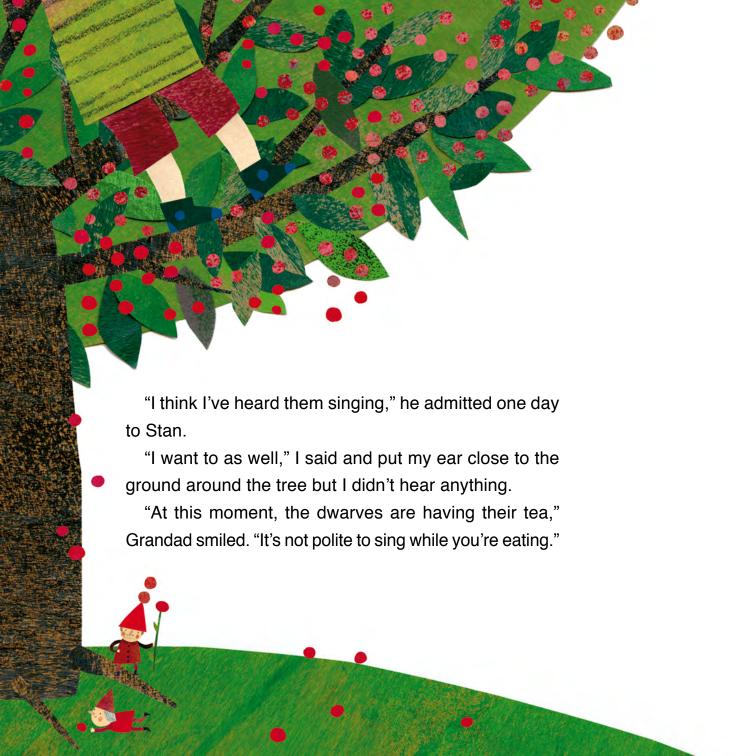
"So that the night can be beautiful and so that those creatures that have got lost can find their way home..." Grandad counted out the reasons with his fingers, "... and there's another reason."

"What is it? What is it?"

"When the little glow-worms shine their lanterns, all over the world fairy-tales are created. Without them, we would not have all those wonderful stories that Mummy reads to you before you go to sleep."











Behind the house there was also a fir tree with soft needles. Before Christmas, we decorated it with lights and baubles. Father Christmas left our presents under the tree. That spring, among the branches of the fir, a pair of blackbirds with yellow beaks made a nest. One day, some tiny little birds appeared in it. You could not see them from the ground but whenever one of the parents came close with a worm in its beak, they all started screaming, as if they were saying, "I want it! Mum! Dad! Here! Give me the worm!"



One day, when I was playing in Grandad's garden, I found one of the little birds under the tree. It had fallen out of the nest.

"Grandad! Grandad! Come quickly!"

"Poor little thing," said Grandad sadly.

"Grandad. Why isn't it moving?" I asked.

"This bird is dead." Grandad was serious and, I think, a little sad. "We'll have to bury it in the ground."

"In the ground?"

"Yes. We'll give it a funeral. We'll put it in the ground, put some nice stones on top and we'll plant some daisies. It will be its grave."

"And we will come and visit the blackbird like with Grandma at the cemetery?" Stan asked gravely.

"Yes, it will be a place in memory of the little blackbird."

Grandad would often tell us about Grandma Anna, whom I never knew. She had died before I was born. I knew she loved flowers and that she had planted the rose bush which leaned against the wooden frame on the side of the house. The bush had red, fragrant flowers. Grandad really looked after this bush. He trimmed it and watered it. Sometimes, he would even talk to it in a whisper.

"It is, for me, a reminder of Grandma. Every time I look at the rose, I recall our moments together," he once explained to us.



Our parents worked long hours and could not pick us up from school and kindergarten. So Grandad came every day and brought us some treats. Sometimes, they were horse-chestnuts, from which we would later make little figures or animals, sometimes lollies, and, one day, a box of coloured chalks. On a piece of the asphalt path, we drew fairy-tale creatures, butterflies and a great yellow sun. Stan even drew a coloured dragon, but it didn't turn out too well.







Whenever we came to the garden, a cat with coloured patches would appear. I would wash its bowl and fill it with fresh milk. We put a soft blanket for it under the table in the porch so that it had somewhere to sleep.

"Grandad, why can't we give the cat a name?"

"Of course you can. It will be very proud."

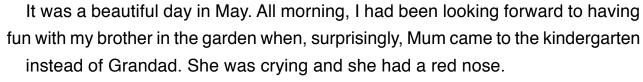
"What about Blot? It's all covered with patches," Stan suggested.

"But it's a female. It should have a girl's name," said Grandad and stroked its back.

"But Grandad! Blot is a very nice name for a girl," Stan called out.

So the cat became Blot and she really liked her name. She would always come when we called her that.





"Where's Grandad?" I asked, but Mum only shook her head and didn't say anything.



We went home. Dad was already there and so was Stan. Dad was in the room and talking on the phone. He was holding his head, as if it hurt. Stan was lying on the carpet and was wiping the tears from his face with his sleeve.

"Stan, does something hurt?" I asked.

"Go away!" he shouted and threw a toy at me. Luckily, it was only a rubber frog but I still burst out crying. Not because it hurt but because it made me very sad.

"Dad, Stan is hitting me!" I started pulling my Dad's sleeve.

"Tony, come here," Dad said so softly that at first I didn't hear it. I wanted to explain that Stan had hit me with the frog but I suddenly realised that something important was happening. I just didn't know what.

"Tony, quiet now, sit here. Stan, come here as well." Dad held out his arms to us. "Tony, I have to tell you something sad. Stan already knows and that's why he's upset. Your Grandad has had a bad heart for a long time. Remember how he quickly became tired when he was going upstairs? Yesterday evening, he felt very ill and went to hospital. The doctors and the nurses did their best to help him but it didn't work. Unfortunately. Grandad died this morning."

After Dad's words, at first it became very quiet. Then Stan started crying again.

"Died? Like the bird in the garden that fell out of the nest?" I asked, as I was trying to understand what Dad had said.

"Yes. Just the same."

"And like Grandma once?"

"Yes, like Grandma."

"When will Grandad come back?"

"He won't come back, darling."

"What do you mean? What about us? Did he forget about us? Dad, you must be mistaken! Grandad would never forget about us."

"Grandad has not forgotten about you. He didn't want to die. His heart stopped working. He couldn't help it. Nobody could. I know that you're very sad. We're all sad."

I couldn't believe that I would no longer have Grandad. Who would come to pick me up from kindergarten? And who would water the vegetables and the flowers in the garden? And the cat that liked Grandad so much? Who would look after her? She would be very sad. And the dwarves and the fairies? Would they be all alone?





kindergarten and school but Mum wasn't there or she shut herself in the bedroom and she didn't want to talk with anyone. Not even with Dad.

I sat on the floor outside the room where Mum had locked the door and I waited

We didn't see Mum hardly at all for several days. Dad brought us home from

until she would come out and finally explain when Grandad would come back. Dad must have made a mistake. Obviously he could not know what had happened to Grandad.

"Stan, shall we go together to find Grandad? Maybe he's in the garden? Or at the market?" I asked my older brother every so often, but he just shouted at me.

I couldn't understand what was happening to us. Mum didn't love me any more.

My brother was angry with me. Everyone was acting strangely. Only Dad would sit me on his lap and hug me.

"Mum is sad now. She needs some time. Soon she will look after you both."

So I tried not to bother her. I sat quietly in my room but I broke a glass and made a lot of noise. Quite by accident. At kindergarten, I hid behind the shelf with the bricks, where you could see the door. Maybe Grandad would appear in the doorway and take me to the garden? Nobody saw me there and everything would have been all right if not for the lying down. I wet myself when I fell asleep after dinner. Once again, there was a fuss as they had to throw away my mattress. I didn't do it on purpose! I wanted to be a good boy! Dad was always making mistakes all the time and forgetting something. Twice, he spilled the tea. He said it was because he missed Grandad.

"Tony, it will pass one day," said Dad. "You'll see – we'll start to talk more about Grandad and remember the good times."

I badly wanted to believe that, but in the meantime it was even worse...







Dad said that we would go to the funeral.

"What will we do there?" I asked.

"The whole of our family will be at the funeral. We will be all together: Mum, you, Stan and I. There will also be aunts, uncles and your cousins. Grandad will be in the coffin, which is a box made out of wood. The coffin and the body will be placed in the ground and buried. We will lay down flowers which we have chosen from the florist's and we will light candles. Grandad will have his grave next to Grandma and we will be able to visit them there."

I didn't like what Dad had said and I didn't like the funeral. Everybody had horrible black clothes and they were crying and singing sadly. I wanted to be well-behaved and not to disturb anyone but nothing much came of that. It seemed to me that I saw Grandad in the distance. I let go of Dad's hand and ran towards him as quickly as I could. I wanted to catch him up. On the way, I bumped into Auntie Barbara, who dropped her bouquet and broke her glass candle. But it wasn't Grandad - it was just some old man dressed like Grandad. What a sad day. It was lucky that our parents and Stan were with me.



The little white house stood hidden among the greenery as usual, but it was somehow different. All of us went there when the summer holidays began and Stan was no longer at school. I ran into the garden and immediately began looking around here and there. Maybe Grandad was hidden somewhere? Maybe in the house? But the house was empty. On the table there was a tea-cup. It was where Grandad had left it. The cat's bowl was empty and dirty. Some leaves had fallen into it, as had a dead fly. Grandad's galoshes, which he had worn when working in the garden, were in the same place as always. They were a bit dusty and one had fallen over. In the middle of the other one, a spider had spun its web. The pansies had all dried up as nobody had watered them for many days. I ran home and fetched a cup of water in order to water the flowers. I stood and waited until they revived.

"They won't revive, Tony, they're dead," said Mum. "We can't help them now."

I felt sadder than I'd ever felt before. I started to cry. It was then that I finally realised that I would never meet Grandad again, either in the garden or anywhere else.





That evening, Mum and Dad talked for a long time. They drank one cup of tea after another. They sat at the table in the kitchen and talked quietly, so as not to wake us. We were supposed to be asleep because it was late, but it wasn't so easy. Something important was going on in the kitchen. In order to hear, we pressed our ears against the closed door.

"They must be talking about Grandad," I whispered.

"Do you remember how Grandad was painting the fence? He was all covered with white paint!" Stan recalled.

"I remember! And then we helped him and we knocked over a tin of paint!"

"Grandad first looked cross but then he smiled. And he didn't tell Mum. She would probably have been upset with us if she had found out."

"Stan, do you remember how we fed the ducks with Grandad by the pond?" I asked quietly.

"I remember," smiled my brother. "And the fishes swam up and stole the bread from the ducks."

"And Grandad said we could do with a fishing-rod, do you remember?"



"Boys, we've got some good news for you," Dad said in

the morning, when we were all around the table to eat our toast and cottage cheese and chives. Mum and Dad both had wonderful smiles.

"Grandad is no longer with us but he did leave a beautiful garden behind him. What do you think – would Grandad have liked us to look after it?" Mum asked and smiled like in the old days. "Particularly Grandma's roses. It helped him after Grandma died and it might also help us."

"How can the garden help us?"

"We'll be there together and we'll be able to talk about Grandad in his favourite place."

"In any case, someone has to look after Blot," Dad added. "She also misses Grandad. What do you say?"

"Yes!" cried Stan and clapped his hands.

"Great!" I said and jumped for joy.

The next day, we went to Grandad's garden.

"Come on, boys. There's a lot to do," said Mum, rolling her sleeves up. Grandad had done exactly the same when he was getting down to work.

We swept the path, watered the vegetables and tore up all the weeds among the rows of courgettes.



"You can hardly see them. They need to be saved from these weeds!" I called out and, for the first time for many days, I felt happy again.

"Grandad has a hoe in his chest. We'll have to find it. It's easier with a hoe. I know how it's done."





"Boys! Come here quickly!" called Dad. He was on the porch. We ran as fast as we could.

"What's happened?" Stan asked.

"Here! Look!" said Dad and showed us the cat's bed. On the blanket three little kittens were asleep with Blot.

"Blot has had kittens!" I exclaimed. "Mum! Mum! Blot has got kittens!"

The kittens were sleeping curled up to each other. Each was a different coloour, like the patches on their mother's fur: one white, one ginger and one black.







Supposedly so old and wise but they knew nothing of the most important things. Who would have thought it – not to know about dwarves and their underground songs and the little fairies living among the leaves of the apple tree? Even Mum, who read us stories every day at bedtime, did not know they they were created thanks to the lanterns of the little fairies. My older brother and I showed and told them everything. Now it was also their garden.







HOW TO ARRONDE Your OUN GARDEN

(with the help of a grown-up)

Everybody can start a small, tiny garden. Just think where you have the space for it: outside, or on the balcony, or on your window-sill? Maybe someone grown-up can advise you? Maybe you can start it together?

First of all, sow some yellow marigolds or colourful pansies. For a young gardener, these are very good plants because they flower from spring to autumn. Now ask Mum or Dad for help in finding or buying the necessary things.

What will you need?

- 1. a small flower-pot with a hole in the bottom
- 2. a saucer under the pot
- 3. some earth
- 4. a trowel
- 5. a marigold or pansy seedling
- 6. a watering-can



What should you do?

Put some earth in the pot with the trowel, but only half-way up. Put the marigold or pansy seedling into the pot and delicately fill the pot with earth so as to hide the seedling's roots. Take care not to damage the seedling and press the earth down. Great! Almost ready. Now place the pot on the saucer and generously water your plant. Does it look nice?

This is not the end of a gardener's work. Remember to check every day whether the earth in the pot is moist. If it is dry, you have to water it again. If you remember to do this, then your little plant will grow to be big and beautiful and covered with flowers!

In this way, you have become a young gardener!





